

Donna Autheris

N^o 21

A
SERMON

Preached to the

SOCIETIES

F O R

REFORMATION

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M A N N E R S.

A T

St. Mary-le-Bow,

O N

Monday, December the 28th,
M DCC XIII.

By J O H N W A U G H, D. D.
Rector of St. Peter's Cornhill.

Published at their R E Q U E S T.

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From a sermon

SERMON

SOCIETIES



REFORMATION

OF

MANNERS

AT

St. Mary-le-Bow,

ON

Monday, December the 28th
MDCCLXIII.

By JOHN WINGFIELD, D.D.
Rector of St. Mary-le-Bow.

Printed by J. Smith, in Pall-mall.

LONDON.

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Opposite near St. James's Church, 1774.

A
SERMON

Preached to the

SOCIETIES

F O R

Reformation of Manners, &c.

PROVERBS xxiv. 25.

But to them that rebuke him, shall be Delight, and a good Blessing shall come upon them.

THE Proverbs of Solomon, which are brief and wise Sentences, for our Direction in all Occurrences of humane Life, are, for the most part, delivered promiscuously, without any great Regard to Order and Method, as containing singly a full and intire Sense. But these Words have a manifest Coherence with the

two preceding Verses, which, to make what followeth the more considerable, are ushered in with this Preface; *These Things also belong to the Wise. It is not good to have respect of Persons in Judgment. He that saith unto the wicked, Thou art righteous, him shall the People curse, Nations shall abhor him: But to them that rebuke him, shall be Delight, and a good Blessing shall come upon them.*

These last Words plainly afford us two forcible Motives to the Performance of a Duty, drawn from the Benefits which redound to those who conscientiously discharge it; *viz. Delight*, or the present Comfort and Satisfaction of their own Conscience; and a *good Blessing* from God, as a further Reward of their faithful Service.

Before I proceed to the handling of these two Points, it is necessary that I, *First*, consider the Duty it self, and its Obligation, with respect both to private Persons and Magistrates, according to their different Capacities and Stations.

There can be no Dispute, but that by *Rebuke* in the Text, we may fairly understand, either that friendly Office exercised by private Persons towards their *trespassing* Brethren, with a Design and Hope of reclaiming them from their evil Ways; or else that severer Method of proceeding by public Censures and legal Punishments, inflicted by Persons in Authority, with the same chari-

charitable View, upon such Offenders as will not be reformed by milder Means. The First of these is a Duty, which all good Men ought to think themselves concerned in, forasmuch as every one is bound to edify his Neighbour, and to promote his spiritual Interest as much as he can. It was a Precept of the Law formerly given to the Jews, Lev. xix. 17. *Thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy Neighbour, and not suffer Sin upon him.* And it is an expresse Command, which our Saviour in his Gospel hath laid upon every private Christian, with regard to Conversation; *If thy Brother offend against thee, admonish him, Matth. xviii. 5.* First, privately, *between thee and him alone*; that there may be no Witnesses of his Disgrace and Reproach: But if private Admonition and Reproof will not reform him, *if he will not hear thee, take one or two more; if he will not hear them, tell it to the Church,* and make it a Matter of publick Cognizance and Complaint. Saint Paul, where he exhorts the *Ephesians* to disclaim all Fellowship with the Works of Darknes, immediately subjoins, *but rather reprove them, Ephes. v. 11.* i. e. convince the ignorant Heathen, if it be possible, of the Folly of their Wickedness, or shame them out of it, by your own good Example, and, by declining as much as may be, all Familiarity and Intimacy with them: For so the same Apostle chargeth the *Thessalonians*, with respect to their Christian Brethren;

6 *A Sermon Preached to the Societies*

thren; *We command you, Brethren, in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw yourselves from every Brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the Tradition which he received of us, 2 Thes. iii. 6. And, If any Man obey not our Word, note that Man, and have no Company with him, that he may be ashamed; Vers. 14. Yet he exhorteth them still, not to count him as an Enemy, but to admonish him as a Brother, Ver. 15. that he may be brought, if possible, to Repentance.*

So that private Christians, we see, have a Call and Authority sufficient to admonish and reprove, where it can be done prudently and seasonably. The Reason plainly is, because it is every Man's Duty and Business to oppose himself to Sin, and endeavour, as much as in him lieth, to suppress and banish it out of the World. For if every Man, as in a common Cause, is concerned to do what he can, to prevent the spreading of an infectious Distemper, that threatens Danger to the whole; much more is he bound to put a Stop to the Leprosy of Vice, which of all contagious Evils is the most pernicious.

We must not then think our selves at Liberty to suffer Sin and Wickedness, committed in our Sight and Hearing, to pass without Correction; nor be cold and timorous in the Cause of God and Religion, lest Profaneness and Immorality get ground, and the Enemy grow more insolent and audacious,

cious, through want of Opposition. But where Circumstances will bear it, we must rebuke with Freedom and Boldness; where they will not, when the Sinner is so harden'd as to despise all Counsel and Reproof, and there is little or no hope of his Amendment by the use of such Means, we must have Recourse to a legal Punishment; we must, upon proper Occasions, give Information to the Magistrate, whose peculiar Province it is to take Care of Religion, so far at least as to restrain wicked and disorderly Men from the open Violation of it, by necessary Correction and exemplary Punishment: *For he is the Minister of God, an Avenger to execute Wrath upon him that doth Evil.* The Sword of Authority is put into his Hands, for the Restraint of Ungodliness, for protecting Religion from the daring Insults that are daily made upon it by its Enemies; for asserting the Cause of Virtue, by a strict Execution of the Laws against Blasphemy, profane Swearing, Sabbath-breaking, Drunkenness, and the like Iniquities. As Providence raised him to the high Station he is in, so he is engaged in Justice and Gratitude to use his Power and Authority for the Glory of God, and the Honour of his Religion. It is not much that private Men can do in these Cases, where the Age is very corrupt; for let their Reproofs be managed with the greatest Conduct and Address that is possible, unless

unless the Persons reprov'd, understand their own Good so well as to take them as they ought, they will not be effectual. The most zealous Endeavours of the Ministers of Christ, whose Office obligeth them to oppose the Progress of Vice, and to regulate the Manners of Christians, are not sufficient, especially under the present Want of Ecclesiastical Discipline, to prevent or remedy great Disorders, without the Assistance of the Civil Powers. Their most passionate Exhortations and Entreaties will work but little upon those, who have no Ingenuity, no Sense of Shame, or Fear of Reproach; and their Threatnings of future Punishments will not make any great Impression on Men, whose *Hearts are hardened*, and whose *Consciences*, as *St. Paul* speaks, *are seared, as it were with a hot Iron*, 1 Tim. iv. 2. This shews the Reasonableness and Necessity of calling in the Aid of the Civil Magistrate, that they who will not be reformed and reclaim'd from an evil Course, by Arguments fetch'd from another World, may be forced into better Manners by temporal Punishments. For though such Penalties inflict'd by the Magistrate upon scandalous Livers, can never of themselves make them Lovers of that which is good, as having no inherent Virtue in them to change their Hearts, and purge their Consciences; yet they are in their Nature apt to humble such Offenders, to put them into a fit
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Temper for Consideration, to give them a Sight of their Sins; and may at length, through God's sanctifying Grace, become efficacious Means of their true and sincere Conversion. Accordingly we may observe, that humane Penalties and Restraints have wrought on wicked and ungodly Men, and prevailed with them to turn from their evil Ways, when Persuasions, Counsels, Admonitions, and all other Methods have proved ineffectual.

But although they were not sufficient to this Purpose, had no Fitness in them to make bad Men better, yet they are of great Use to prevent their growing worse, and more hardened in their Sins. For the longer they are suffered to go on with Impunity, the more they will encourage themselves in their Wickedness, and become more resolute and presumptuous in *doing Evil*.

This is what Solomon long ago observed with respect to the Punishments and Judgments of God; that though he had denounced a dreadful Doom against all wicked Men; yet because Execution is not presently done upon them, they are apt to harden and encourage themselves in their Sin; *Because Sentence against an evil Work is not executed speedily, therefore the Heart of the Sons of Men is fully set in them to do Evil*; Eccles. viii.

ii. And we see in daily Experience, that the greatest part of Sinners abuse and pervert the Patience and Long-suffering of God,

which was designed to reclaim them to a quite contrary Purpose, the confirming them in their wicked Ways. They are ready to raise Objections against the Providence of God, and draw false Conclusions from his Delay of Punishment; as if either He did not concern himself in humane Affairs, or did not regard the good and bad Actions of Men: and so think themselves at Liberty to be as irreligious and wicked as they please. But much more when the Execution of good and wholesome Laws against them is for any Time deferred, and there is no Curb nor Controul from the Secular Arm: They will then be apt to conclude, that Governours and Magistrates are like themselves; that they secretly believe as they do; have the same Notions of Good and Evil, Right and Wrong, which they themselves have, though they do not so openly avow it. And then there is hardly any Thing left to restrain them from following the Bent of their own corrupt Hearts and vile Affections, to whatsoever Kinds and Degrees of Sin they incline them, till they arrive at the utmost pitch of Wickedness, the *Seat of the Scorners*. Wherefore the Interposition of Authority, for the Punishment of evil Doers, is highly expedient, if for no other Reason, yet to keep them within some tolerable Bounds, that they do not run blindly and headily to such an Exorbitancy of Vice and Profaneness, as will fill
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up the Measure of their Iniquity, and sink them into the lowest Place of Torments.

But the Infliction of legal Penalties is necessary upon another Account, I mean, to prevent the Contagion of bad Example, that the Venom spread no farther, to taint the sound Members, and corrupt those who are well disposed. It hath always been thought the wisest Course to cut off an incurable Member, when the whole Body is in Danger of being infected by it; and it is, doubtless, a necessary Piece of Justice, to punish a hardened hopeless Wretch, when many honest innocent People may, probably, be ensnared by his ill Example: Nay, 'tis better Thousands such Miscreants should be cut off, than that they should be suffered to go through the World, corrupting others, and speaking wicked Blasphemies against the most High.

The Multitude of bad Examples is very great, and the Influence of them very prevalent; but it is in the Power of Christian Magistrates considerably to lessen the Number, and abate the Force of them. If they would use their Authority to that End, by a steady and impartial Correction of Vice, and second and support it with their own good Example, it would go a great Way to cure the guilty, and preserve the innocent. We see how strongly the Example of a great

Man, tho' in a *private Station*, does allure and invite to the Imitation of it, even in Things which seem to be against the Bent and Inclination of humane Nature, but much more the *Example of such an one in Authority*. And if Magistrates would make this their Business, by an exemplary Conversation, and a strict Execution of the Laws against licentious and scandalous Delinquents, it is not to be doubted, but their honest Endeavours would be attended with answerable Success; and a *good Blessing be upon them*.

I proceed now to consider the two Motives, which the wise Man here sets before us, to excite us to the Performance of the Duty I have been explaining and recommending; to wit, *Delight*, and a *good Blessing*.

I. *Delight*, or an inward Joy and Satisfaction, flowing from the Testimony of a good Conscience, which is the most agreeable of all Comforts. That which distinguisheth the Pleasure of doing Good in any Kind, from all sensual and worldly Pleasures, is, that it doth not presently vanish and expire as soon as the Act is over, but the Thoughts of it lie easy in Mens Minds, and the Reflexion upon it doth for ever after minister Comfort and Delight to them. The Remembrance of past Benefits and Kindnesses done to others, is a lasting Contentment to
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our selves, and a perpetual and never-failing Source of solid and substantial Joy.

Now the greatest Good that one Man can possibly do for another, is, according to the Advantages and Opportunities God hath afforded him, to assist and further him in the Way of Salvation; to keep him, if it may be, within the Lines of Duty: and when he hath transgressed, to endeavour to *restore such an one*, and reclaim him to a better Course. That Charity which is intended for the Good of Mens Bodies, by relieving their temporal Wants, is certainly a singular Benefit to those who receive it, and a Service highly acceptable to God; but yet it falls far short of this, which is employ'd in promoting the eternal Welfare of their Souls. This Solomon seems to have considered, and to have given it the Preference in that proverbial Saying; *The Fruit of Righteousness is a Tree of Life; but he that winneth Souls is wise*, Prov. xi. 30. The doing Good to Mens Souls, by promoting their eternal Happiness, was the chief End for which the Son of God came into the World; and his great Work and Business when he was there: *The Word was made Flesh, and dwelt among us*, purposely to call Sinners to Repentance; and to seek and to save that which was lost; and he went about from Place to Place to find out Opportunities for it. Which plainly shews us how much the Conversion of Sinners lay at our Saviour's

our's Heart, and how desirous He was to do Good to Mens Souls. And this may reach us, how agreeable and pleasant that Work must needs be to a good Man, with which the Son of God was so much delighted.

Accordingly we find how zealous and unwearied our Lord's Apostles were, after his Ascension into Heaven, in furthering and promoting the common Salvation of all Men; how they *went about*, as their Master had done before them, making Proselytes, and endeavouring to bring both *Jew and Gentile* to the Faith of Christ. The Consideration of the Excellency of the Work they were engaged in, inspired them with a more than common Zeal and Industry in carrying it on; and the Pleasure and Satisfaction they took in *bringing forth much fruit* to God, made them willing to sacrifice themselves, and all that was dear to them, for the Accomplishment of that End. With what Earnestness doth St. Paul express his Concern for the Salvation of his Countreymen the Jews, Rom. x. 1. *Brethren, my Heart's Desire and Prayer to God for Israel, is, that they might be saved?* So warm and passionate are his Expressions of Kindness to them in this Particular, that they have been thought by some hardly reconcileable with Reason and Religion, as if he had desired *their* Salvation with the Loss of his *own*; *I could wish*, says he, *that my self were accursed*
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from Christ for my Brethren, Rom. ix. 3. that is, I could even wish it, were such a Wish lawful, and available to bring to pass so great a Good, as the Salvation of such a Body of Men. Which is more than sufficient to shew, how zealously he was concerned for their Happiness. And it cannot but be highly pleasing to a good Man, while he is exercised in the charitable Work of saving Souls, to consider, that he is imitating, in such a Degree as he is capable of, this great *Apostle*, in a Thing which, next to the saving of his own Soul, is of the greatest Concernment: That he is endeavouring to rescue those from eternal Misery, for whom Christ died, in Order to make his Death effectual to their Salvation, and prevent whatever may render it in vain, as all Impiety and Wickedness will most certainly do.

These and the like Thoughts will yield unspeakable Comfort to such an one in his Life-time, but especially on a Death-bed, when he is going out of the World, and considers how he hath answered the Ends of his coming into it, how zealous he hath been in promoting the Glory of God, how diligent in working out his own, and how instrumental in procuring the Salvation of others. When his Conscience tells him, that he hath sincerely endeavoured, in that Station wherein God hath placed him, to reform

form the Manners of his Christian Brethren, and reclaim Sinners from their evil Courses, by wholesome Advice, good Example, and due Restraint, where milder Methods would not prevail. That he hath not gone about to palliate or excuse Vice in any Person, or neglected to reprove it; but is *pure from the Blood of all Men*; no Way accessory to their *Guilt*, and therefore in no Fear of partaking in their *Punishment*: So far from that, that he hath *the full Assurance of Hope* of being rewarded for a faithful and conscientious Discharge of this Duty, with a *good Blessing* from God: which is,

II. The other *Motive* mentioned in the *Text*, to excite and quicken Mens Endeavours to a due Performance of it. Far be it from us to suppose, that a just and righteous God should let this *Work and Labour of Love* pass without a Reward, or that He will not consider it in Proportion to the Measure of Good that is done by it, and the Discouragements and Difficulties with which it is usually attended. Saint *James* commends it to us as a Work of so great Worth in the Sight of God, that it will prevail with him, through the Merits of Christ, to cover many of our Sins, many Slips and Failings in our Duty; *Let him know*, saith he, *that he who converteth a Sinner from the Error of his Ways,*

shall

shall save a Soul from Death, and shall hide a Multitude of Sins, Jam. v. 20. And can there be a more desirable Thing than this, for a Man not only *not* to have the Sins of others to answer for, but moreover to be rewarded with the Forgiveness of his own? And yet the Prophet *Daniel* seems to go further than this, intimating in those metaphorical Expressions, that they who are faithful and industrious in this great and important Service, shall be advanced to a higher Degree of Glory in the next World than other Men; *They that are wise shall shine as the Brightness of the Firmament; and they that turn many unto Righteousness, as the Stars for ever and ever, Dan. 12. 3.*

But the good Blessing, which is here said to be consequent upon a faithful Discharge of this Duty, may signify not only the Blessing of God, but also of Men, according to this obvious and easy Sense of the Words, *Whoever he be that saith unto the wicked, Thou art righteous; that pronounceth him innocent, and acquits him in Judgment of the Charge and Accusation that is brought against him, the People shall curse and abhor him; but they who give a Check to Vice and Wickedness, by the Correction and Punishment of Evil-doers, shall have for their Reward not only the Satisfaction of a good Conscience, but the Blessing of God, and the Praise of Men.* Every Man, as it follows, shall kiss his

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Lips

Lips that giveth a right Answer, or passeth a righteous Sentence without Fear or Favour; he shall, for his Integrity, Wisdom, and Courage, be had in universal Esteem. A good Magistrate, by the Awe of Civil Justice, maintaineth Peace and good Order in the World, and restrains wicked and ungodly Men from doing those Things which would make others miserable; and therefore is respected and honoured by those, who have no great Regard to Religion, for Reasons of State. Their Civil Rights and secular Interests, which lie closest to their Hearts, are secured by his Vigilance, Care, and impartial Execution of Justice upon the Invaders of them, and they cannot but bless him by whom they enjoy these Temporal Blessings. And if Men, who have no farther View than their secular Advantage, cannot help having an inward Esteem for a good and religious Magistrate, what Honour and Veneration may not such an one expect from those, who are truly concerned for Religion and the Glory of God; while they see his Zeal for both, in rebuking open Profaneness and Immorality, and distributing just Punishments to all those who dishonour God, and contemn his Religion? As a due Care and Concern for God, and his Laws, is the most valuable Thing in the World, so it will give the truest Value to him,

him, who, in the Integrity of his Heart, useth that Sword which the God of Justice hath put into his Hands, against such as blaspheme his most holy Name, trample upon his Laws, and deride his Religion. This will endear him effectually to the better and wiser Part of a Nation, and make him so honourable in the Opinion and Estimation of Mankind, that not only the present, but succeeding Generations, shall *rise up, and call him Blessed.*

And now to *apply* what hath been discoursed, to the Occasion of this solemn Meeting; If it be incumbent on private Men to be concerned for *others*, as well as their *own* Salvation, then you, GENTLEMEN, who have formed and united your selves into *Societies* for this very Purpose, are bound to use your best Endeavours to carry on that blessed and charitable Design; First, by friendly Advice, private Admonitions, and seasonable and discreet Reproofs; and where these do not take Place, by Informations and Appeals to the secular Magistrate.

You need not be told, how nice and difficult a Thing it is to manage a Reproof so, as to render it effectual to the reforming an Offender, and not exasperate and harden him the more. Wherefore you ought to take the more Heed to govern your selves in this ticklish Point, with that Caution and Con-

duct, with that Temper and Moderation, as to discharge this important Duty with Advantage and Success. To which Purpose great Regard is to be had to the Circumstances of *Time* and *Place*, that it be done at a proper Season, when the Party reprov'd is in a right Disposition for it, when he is most calm and sedate, his Passions hush'd, and his Reason clear; for then he is fittest to be spoke with, and easiest to be perswaded.

2. That it be done as privately, and with as little Noise as may be, that when you go about to *reform* your Brother, you do not *expose* and *disgrace* him. Some indeed are to be treated with greater Openness and Freedom; publick and scandalous Offenders are to be rebuked publicly, that they may, if possible, be ashamed; and that *others may fear*; so St. Paul directeth Timothy, *Those that sin, that is, openly, rebuke before all.*

3. Great Caution also is to be observed in the Manner of applying your Reproofs, that it be with all Gentleness and Meekness, that, under the Pretence of reprov'ing Men, you do not revile them; with due Gravity and Seriousness, to shew them you are in Earnest; and with that Kindness and Concern as may convince them, that though you hate their Vices, yet you heartily desire their Welfare. But though a mild and tender
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Way of treating Offenders be, generally speaking, the most likely to succeed; yet in the Case of obstinate and hardened Sinners, greater Sharpness and Severity is to be used, according to the Advice which the same *Apostle* gives *Titus*, *Rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the Faith*, Tit. i. 13.

4. But if, after a careful Practice of these, and such other Rules as Opportunity and Prudence may suggest, your Admonitions and Reproofs are ineffectual, you are then to try the last Remedy, a legal *Information* and *Appeal* to the Civil Magistrate.

For though it hath always been reckoned among civiliz'd People, an odious Thing to be officious in this Kind; and there have been so many false and vexatious *Informers* against another Sort of Men, that the very Name carries Infamy along with it; yet where the *Thing it self* is absolutely necessary, for the Prevention of some great Evil, or the Advancement of the publick Good, a Man is so far from deserving Blame for doing it, that it would be an unpardonable Fault in him to decline doing the *Thing*, for Fear of the *Name*. And thus it is in the Case before us. Those wholesome Laws made against Vice and Profaneness by our prudent Legislature, can never be duly executed without *Information* given; nor the guilty be punished, if none do voluntarily appear as Evidence against them.

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The Laws of themselves are a dead Letter, it is *Execution* that gives them Life; and, since they cannot be executed upon Offenders, except their Offences come to the Magistrate in a legal Way, can it be infamous to endeavour, that these Laws shall have their full Force and Authority? Shall honest and conscientious Men suffer in their Character, and be reproached, who, out of Zeal to Religion and the publick Good, are strict and active in the Discovery and Prosecution of *Drunkenness*, *Blasphemy*, *Swearing*, *Cursing*, *Lewdness*, *Profanation of the Lord's-Day*, and other Crimes of the like Nature? They insinuate no Falshoods, bring no slanderous Accusations against the *Innocent*, nor prosecute the *Guilty* with any other Design, than to reform and reclaim them. And they are so far from making a Trade of this Undertaking, (as some most maliciously have called it) that they challenge all Men to prove, that any concerned in these Societies ever took Money, either *by Way of Reward for detecting*, or *by Way of Bribery, for concealing Offenders*. Nor can I hear, that, in the Course of so many Years as the Societies have been on Foot, their most prying Adversaries could ever prove such Practices upon any Person, who is really a Member of them, though their Malice was hardy enough to accuse them. And whilst there is no Proof of *Indirect Dealing*, no Suspicion of Prejudice or Spleen

Spleen to be gratified, since most of those against whom they *inform*, are not otherwise known to the Prosecutor but by their Crimes; if, on the contrary, there is all the Reason in the World to believe, that they act upon a truly religious Principle, out of a Zeal for God, and a charitable Concern for the Offenders themselves; in such a Case * *to be called Informers, is so far from making them odious in the Judgment of sober Persons, that it will tend to their Reputation and Honour.*

You are not therefore to be discouraged from the good Work you are engaged in, with reproachful Names and groundless Calumnies, fixed upon you by obnoxious Men, and such as are Enemies to God and Goodness: It is no more than what you might reasonably expect from the Experience of past Ages, when you associated your selves to correct the Errors, and reform the Vices of a corrupt and licentious World. It hath been the Lot of holy and religious Men in all Ages, to be evil spoken of, and loaded with odious Names. The Trade of reviling *Christians* begun very early, and it hath continued, and been practised ever since. When the Enemies of Truth had called the
Master

* The present Lord Arch-Bishop of Canterbury's Circular Letter, dated April 4. 1699.

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Master of the House Beelzebub, we cannot suppose that *those of his Household* could long escape their envenomed Tongues. The Reward the *Apostles* had for preaching the Gospel, and endeavouring to bring Men over to the Faith, was Calumny and Defamation, Hatred and ill Usage. They were brought before Magistrates, and accused of Innovation and Sedition, as *Men that exceedingly troubled the City, and turned the World upside down*. Nor did this black Art of scandalizing the sincere Professors and Promoters of Religion, die with the *Apostles*, but their Successors met with the same ill Treatment, with bitter Invectives and Slanders from the *Heathen*, who charged them with all those Crimes that could render them and their Religion vile and infamous. And it is too notorious to be denied, that they of the Church of *Rome* have exactly copied after all those who went before them in this Cursed Policy, and have been countenanced and encouraged by the *Popes* themselves, to vent Calumnies, and spread false Reports against the first Reformers, and other Protestants, who have had the Courage to oppose their gross and gainful Errors and Superstitions.

I have mentioned these Instances on Purpose to shew you, that the best Men in all Ages have been slandered and abused, and their most laudable Actions disparaged by those

those, who are Enemies to both; and that therefore you are not to wonder, that you and your excellent Undertaking should meet with the same Fate; or be concerned at the *Reproaches* of wicked Men, for endeavouring to suppress those Impieties, which have so long been a *Reproach* to our Religion and Government.

The Business you are engaged in, is the same that the blessed Jesus came into the World about, and for which he *did* and *suffered* so much; and you have no Cause to be troubled, but rather to rejoice, that while you are doing the same Work, you endure some of the same Sufferings; since *If you suffer, you shall also reign with him.*

Let no Man's Heart then fail him, because he is reviled for maintaining the common Cause of Religion, and our Civil Liberties; for promoting the Honour of Almighty God, and the Safety of his Countrey, which are all great Sufferers by Vice and Immorality, and therefore nearly concerned in a general Reformation. None but the Profane and Profligate will dare to accuse you for enterprizing so noble and glorious a Work, or condemn you for pursuing it with Zeal and Vigour. And what Wonder is it, that Men, who are conscious to themselves of their own Guilt, should be at

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Enmity with those, who would discover it to others? that they who *walk in Darknefs, and hate the Light*, should endeavour all they can to extinguish the Light, that they may not be detected, nor their *Deeds be reprov- ed?*

If any of the sober Part of the Nation did at first shew any Dislike to the Design it self, or afterwards entertain any Prejudices against your Proceedings in it, it is owing, I am apt to think, partly to some Jealousies they may have had of the ill Consequences of such Combinations; and partly to their too great Easiness in believing the false Reports, the Lies and Libels of the abandoned Party. But Experience, and the great Success wherewith God hath been pleased, in the Course of a few Years, to bless your good Endeavours, have, I hope, fully convinced all who will be convinced, not only of the Usefulness of the Undertaking, but of your Integrity and Prudence in the Management of it.

Let not then the guilty Tribe, by their Obloquy and Clamours, discourage you from carrying on this important Service to Religion, and your Countrey, to greater Perfection; for though much Good hath been already done; many Thousands of lewd and disorderly Persons have been punished, and pub-

publick Vice and Profaneness received a considerable Check; yet there is still enough to exercise your best Resolution and Care. Though the *Sons of Anak* be destroyed out of the Land, yet many of the old Inhabitants are still left, to be Thorns in our Sides, and Pricks in our Eyes. Should you, which God forbid, slacken in the Pursuit, the Enemy would soon rally and make Head again.

It must needs be, as our Saviour warneth us, *that Scandals come*; and the Nature of Things is such, that, if continual Care be not taken to remove them, they will certainly encrease. And therefore as there will always be Matter for a *publick Reformation*, so there will always be Occasion for the like Courage and Constancy in promoting it. You must therefore persist and persevere in this necessary Work, with the same Caution and Discretion, the same Sincerity and Singleness of Heart, as you have hitherto done, making the Laws of the Land the Rule of all your Proceedings, and the Glory of God, and the Salvation of Souls, the great End of them.

Be not then dismayed at any farther Opposition and Discouragement you may meet with in the Prosecution and Punishment of Vice, from those whose Interest it is, that Virtue should utterly be banished from a-

mong us, while you have G O D, and our most pious *Queen*, on your Side, the Hearts and Prayers of all good Men, and the Consciences of the very worst. But proceed courageously in the Strength of these Aids, to correct the Impieties of a loose Age, and to restore a true Sense and Practice of Religion among us. And O! that Heaven, as it hath begun, would go on to bless the Nation with such a Happiness, and refresh the Souls of righteous Men, vexed and tired with the filthy Conversation of the wicked, by a *general Reformation*.

This would prove the most effectual Remedy to cure the unhappy Differences, which at present so miserably divide and distract this Kingdom; and the best Expedient to procure and preserve Peace amongst us, and give us stable and settled Times. We cannot possibly frame in our Minds a more happy State of Things, than would presently appear, if the true Fear of God, and the Practice of Righteousness, did every where prevail amongst us. There would then be no opprobrious Names of Distinction heard in our Streets, none of that Tumult and Disorder, that fierce Heat and Party Rage, which appears upon all Occasions, to the unspeakable Grief and Disturbance of all honest and peaceable Men. A
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found and thorough Sense of Religion, running through a Nation, would bring all Men to such a Temper as this, and correct and subdue those unreasonable Lusts and Passions, which are the Causes of Enmity and Division. And though it is hardly to be hoped, that Religion should ever make such an universal Conquest over the Minds of all Men; yet certain it is, that to those small Remainers of Piety and Virtue, which are yet left scattered among us, it is chiefly owing, that we enjoy any Peace at all, and do not run into utter Confusion.

May then the God of all Power, and the Author of all Holiness, bless and prosper the Endeavours of those, who, in their several Stations, labour to promote greater Degrees of Virtue and Piety, by discouraging and punishing Vice and Wickedness: May He multiply their Number, increase their Zeal, grant them here present Success; and crown their faithful Services hereafter with an abundant and glorious Reward.

“ **O** Almighty God, who out of the
“ Mouths of Babes and Sucklings hast
“ ordained Strength, and madest Infants
“ to glorifie Thee by their Death; mort-
“ tifie and kill all Vices in us, and so
“ streng-

30 *A Sermon Preached to the Societies, &c.*

“ strengthen us by thy Grace, that, by the
“ Innocency of our Lives, and Constancy of
“ our Faith, even unto Death, we may
“ glorify thy holy Name, through Jesus
“ Christ our Lord. *Amen.*



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